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The importance of being humorous:

A study of humour in English university lectures within the BASE corpus

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Dissertation submitted for the degree of

Master of Research in Education

CREET

The Open University

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and objectives

My research project is an exploratory study of the linguistic/ sociolinguistic aspects of patterns and roles of humour in English university lectures selected from the holdings of the BASE corpus. Humour has long been investigated in psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and linguistics, but humour in academic contexts, especially cross-cultural teaching and learning, is relatively unexplored. My research helps to fill this gap by investigating some fundamental questions. In addressing these questions, my aim is to develop a framework which is beneficial for future enquiry:

- How should humour be defined in the setting of English university lectures?
- Is humour pervasive in English university lectures?
- Are there any perceptible forms of humour in the lectures? What are the dimensions needed to classify forms of humour in the lectures?
- What are the interactional functions of humour in the lectures?

1.2 Rationale of this study

1.2.1. The initial interest

The research interest of this dissertation was derived from my personal experience as an international student in England, when I repeatedly encountered occasions in which jokes fell flat on me while other members, many of whom were native speakers, had burst into laughter. Upon reflection, it seemed that often I heard what had been said, but failed to notice or appreciate what had been funny. Such failures gradually damaged confidence in my English language competence, hindered me from actively participating in the lectures and, eventually, making contact with the lecturers or native speakers after class. As a result I preferred to

make friends with Chinese students, and during our talks I realised that I was not the only one who had felt the difficulty. These experiences led me to conduct literature searches of academic investigations of humour in lectures; and of international students' understanding of humour in academic contexts. The result of these searches revealed a comparatively blank area and hence inspired me to propose a study to fill the gap.

The following two sections are designed to account for this gap of research interest. A brief history of humour research is firstly given with the intention to show what has been investigated in this field. Then I will move onto literature which highlights the difficulties that international students have in understanding English lecturers' humour.

1.2.2. A brief history of humour study

The study of humour, through its long history, has been explored by some prestigious names in western culture including Aristotle, Cicero, Freud, Bergson and Pirandello. It is an interdisciplinary field encompassing anthropology, philosophy, psychology and linguistics. However, unlike their counterparts, linguistic approaches did not occupy a notable position in humour studies until the 1980s (Attardo, 2005). Raskin's semantic-script theory of humour developed in Raskin (1985) is, according to Attardo (1994: 207), "the first (and only) formal, full-fledged application of a coherent theory of semantics to humour". A significant contribution was made by Attardo (1994) to the synthesis of the different approaches to linguistic research on humour and leads to a new phase in the development of humour research. Since Attardo (*ibid.*), there have been constant attempts, such as Attardo (1997, 2001), Curcó (1995, 1996a, b, 1998) and Yus (2003), to establish an universal framework for analysing jokes in literature and *narrative/canned jokes*¹ in conversation. Meanwhile, more and more researchers have become interested in studying *conversational humour* especially its interactional functions in daily communication. One important strand of such study is informed by *Conversation Analysis* (CA) (Norricks 1993, 2003; Kottthoff 2003; Glenn 2003). Another salient strand features the use of large corpora consisting of long recordings of spontaneous conversations, which includes the New Zealand-based Language in the Workplace project led by Janet Holmes (Holmes, 2000, 2007; Holmes & Marra 2002a, b; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003) and research on gender in humour by both Jennifer Hay (Hay, 1995, 2000, 2001) and Jennifer Coates (Coates, 2007). Besides the above studies which explicitly classify themselves as humour research, the recent surge of interest in everyday

language creativity and language play (Carter 1999, 2004; Carter & McCarthy 2004; Cook 1997, 2000; Crystal 1998; Maybin and Swann 2006; Tannen 1989) signified by Maybin and Swann eds. (2007) also contains a strong focus on humour.

1.2.3. Difficulties for international students understanding English humour and the gap of related research

The rise of humour research is the irresistible result of humour's prevalence within different cultures. According to Fox (2005), humour dominates conversations between English people:

Virtually all English conversations and social interactions involve at least some degree of banter, teasing, irony, wit, mockery, wordplay, satire, understatement, humorous self-deprecation, sarcasm, pomposity-pricking or just silliness. Humour is not a special, separate kind of talk: it is our 'default mode'; it is like breathing; we cannot function without it.

Fox (2005: 402)

She further deduces some perceptive rules governing features of English humour:

- The 'not being earnest' rule: the English people cannot bear solemnity and earnestness
- Irony rules: the English people enjoy understatement and self-deprecation

We may imagine that in a society filled with humorous interactions like England, as Fox (2005) believes, the ability to understand and then participate in joking episodes is important to the development of rapport. However, although humour in daily conversation, similarly, is highly valued as a verbal art in many societies, sociolinguistic variance is eternally inherent in the nature of humour. Fox (2005) points out the difficulties of foreigners interpreting English humour. An American visitor's complaint that "you never know whether they are being serious or not" (ibid.: 65) provides anecdotal evidence of this confusion.

At the same time, one may suggest that it is highly unlikely that Fox's rules will govern all of the English, regardless of age, gender, education, origin and status. Fox only makes generalisations about "Englishness". Is humour still pervasive if we focus on a comparatively serious context, like academic study? Furthermore, would humour in academic life cause similar problems for language learners? For the first question, no existing surveys can provide any clues. As an international student in England, I frequently experience and

observe humour in my academic setting, but further substantive research evidence is surely needed.

As for the second question, although there is no directly relevant research on humour in English academic contexts, a couple of investigations conducted in other cultures may give us some clues:

- Based on their research project in a Hong Kong university, Flowerdew & Miller (1996) notice discrepancies in the perceptions of humour between students and lecturers together with the subsequent problems it causes:

It needs to be accepted by lecturers and students that there is likely to be cross-cultural misunderstanding as far as humour is concerned and that, as a result, lecturers, on the one hand, may be perceived by their students as lacking in human warmth, and students, on the other hand, may be perceived by their lecturers as unresponsive. Students, who may not be accustomed to their teachers being humorous, need to be made aware that lecturers are likely to use humour as an integral part of their lecturing style and that a lot of it may be above their heads.

Flowerdew & Miller (*ibid.*: 137)

- Davies (2003: 1361) deals with cross-cultural conversations recorded in an American university which “highlight the apparently arbitrary nature of idiomatic expressions, the difficulty of coping with interaction in the new language, and the general powerlessness of the language learner in a world of native speakers”.

In fact, miscommunication in cross-cultural teaching and learning has long drawn the attention of social researchers (cf. den Brok & Levy 2005; den Brok, Levy et al. 2002; Hofstede 1986; Levy, Wubbels et al. 1997; Ting-Toomey 1999). Hofstede (1986: 301) points out that when “teacher and student come from different cultures, such as in the context of economic development programmes, many perplexities can arise”. Humour is deeply embedded in cultural context (cf. Apte 1985), hence it inevitably contributes to these perplexities. I am inclined to believe that the problems raised in Flowerdew & Miller (1996) and Davies (2003) are not unique in the universities they researched, because many of my international classmates and I myself sometimes feel frustrated when trying to understand our

native-speaker tutors' humour. The number of international students studying in English universities is increasing (the number of Non-EU domiciled students increased by 5% to 201,740 between years 2005/06 and 2006/07²). These students are inevitably faced with culture shock, and more discouraging is the fact that most of them are postgraduates who only have a single year in the country (57% of the total 239,210 non-EU domicile students in the UK in 2006/07 were postgraduates²). They may not have enough time and energy to communicate with native speakers outside lectures and seminars. For that reason we can imagine how they struggle to understand their lecturers' humour.

I would argue then, that there is a pressing need for us to investigate how humour is applied by lecturers in English universities. However, from my searches in major linguistic and educational journals including *Applied Linguistics*, the *Journal of Pragmatics*, *ELT Journal* and *Humour*, I noticed that relevant investigations are rare. Despite the considerable amount of humour research mentioned in the introduction, not one of these studies is about humour in university lectures and the comprehension difficulties it causes for students. The only two slightly relevant pieces are Flowerdew & Miller (1996) and Davies (2003). Although the implications of humour and language play for English Language Teaching (ELT) have constantly been investigated and emphasised by scholars (cf. Attardo 1994: 211; Carter 2004; Cook 2000; Pomerantz & Bell 2007), their concerns have neither extended to teaching beyond ELT nor the ways in which teachers themselves handle humour. Based on the above account, I believe this research will contribute to filling the gap.

1.3 Organisation of this dissertation

The rest of the dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 is the literature review where I select and examine applicable theories and frameworks to apply in my data analysis.

In Chapter 3 I present the design and rationale of my main research method, which can be summarised as pragmatics-informed discourse analysis of humour recorded in a language corpus. Herein I introduce my data source, the BASE corpus, followed by a review of its limitations. Alternative data collecting methods are assessed with explanations for not

applying them.

Chapter 4 contains two main sections. Firstly, there are full details of the procedures for defining, identifying and selecting humour from the BASE corpus. Secondly, I attempt to build up multi-dimensional categorisation of humour forms in the lectures.

Chapter 5 is the discourse analysis of humour samples based on the theoretical frameworks introduced in chapter 2, which serve to discover the interactional functions of humour in BASE lectures.

Chapter 6 is titled ‘findings and implications’ where I summarise and demonstrate how my research questions are investigated and answered by my research. I also point out the implications of my research and some reflective notes which are valuable for the future study.

Despite the lack of precedent for similar research, universal linguistic theories and humour-related research projects provide ample examples of methods and frameworks for my intended linguistic approach to humour in English universities. In the next chapter, I will review some of them.

2. Literature review

I will start this chapter by discussing briefly how my data analysis can be informed by pragmatics, and then I will move on to examine related theories and frameworks to be applied. However in this chapter, I will only examine the theoretical frameworks I intend to employ in my data analysis of forms and functions of humour. For the historical discussion of the definition and classification of humour, which is supposed to be the fundamental consideration in humour research, is not included here. I will turn to it in chapter 4 in relation to my sample selection and classification procedures. Before elaborating on the theoretical frameworks, I would like to discuss briefly why I have chosen them.

2.1 Pragmatics and conversational humour study

Pragmatics has become a branch of linguistics dealing with the meaning of words dependent on the particular context in which they occurred, while semantics deals with the stable meaning independent of contexts (Matthews, 2007b). In this respect, most humour can be seen as the effect of pragmatic meaning. For example, the semantic meaning of ‘Mary is a good singer’ is obvious, but for someone who knows Mary and the fact that she is actually an awful singer, this comment may sound ironic. During my reading of research on conversational humour, I noticed an obvious orientation to pragmatics. This orientation has been confirmed by Attardo himself: Attardo (2003: 1289-1290) believes that pragmatics is the natural and inevitable place to locate humour research, and conversational humour research such as Janet Holmes’ and Jennifer Hay’s are essentially pragmatic studies. As a result, I decided to limit my selection of frameworks within the pragmatic domain.

Four pragmatic and pragmatics-oriented theories, as I noticed, are those most used in humour study. However, their compatibility with my study requires exploration. Here I shall refer briefly to what is relevant to my data analysis, and undertake more critical discussion in chapter 5.

2.2 Grice’s Communicative Principle

Paul Grice was the first to propose a set of principles for the conversation of all human beings. His work is regarded as one of the foundations of modern pragmatics. Grice (1975) puts forward the *Cooperative Principle* (CP), according to which a participant in a conversation, in order to get meaning across, should make a contribution as required by the purpose of the exchange. The information sender should obey four maxims:

- *Quantity*: be as informative as is required; do not be more informative than is required
- *Quality*: be truthful
- *Relation*: be relevant
- *Manner*: be clear and brief

Grice (ibid.) further articulates that a speaker can *violate* a maxim, i.e. choose not to follow a

maxim and be non-cooperative, so then the exchange ends up uncommunicative; he/she can also *flout* a maxim: the speaker disobeys a maxim in order to convey implicit meanings, and the hearer, first failing to receive useful information from the literal words, turns to another maxim and infers the *implicature*.

The CP has played a very important role in humour research. Grice himself actually applies his theory to irony as a first attempt in the field of humour. As Attardo (2005: § 4.1) claims, 'all jokes involve violations of one or more of Grice's maxims.' The following two examples are given in Attardo (1994: 272):

"Excuse me, do you know what time it is?"

"Yes."

The answer does not provide the information required by the question, so the maxim of quantity is violated.

"Why did the Vice President fly to Panama?"

"Because the fighting is over" (Johnny Carson, Jan. 19, 1990)

This was a fake story told by Johnny Carson, an American comedian, in 1990. He was teasing Dan Quayle, the Vice President at that time, for his cowardice by alluding to the fact that the VP enrolled in the National Guard allegedly to avoid serving in the Vietnam War. He violated the maxim of quality.

Attardo (ibid.) also criticises CP. He believes that CP is based on too strict a premise in that the speaker is committed to the truth and relevance of his/her utterance and the hearer is aware of the commitment. If the hearer is in any doubt about the compliance of the speaker, that is to say, if the premise disappears, the hearer assumes a CP violation and suspends all inferences. As a result, the communication is invalid and no information is conveyed. However, in the case of jokes, a number of them "do not flout, or exploit, the maxims, but ... they violate them." (Attardo, 1994: 273) For example, in Attardo's first example, inadequate information is provided, while there is no way the hearer can work out any fulfilment of another maxim. According to CP, the natural conclusion is that joking causes invalid communication, hence is non-cooperative behaviour. This is unconvincing since jokes do

make sense (at least they are recognised as jokes). Otherwise, the fact would not exist that, in many cultures, jokes are welcomed as a kind of art. Therefore, the strict premise of CP becomes problematic in analysing jokes. Attardo points out that ‘two sets of contradictory facts are generated’:

On the one hand, joking is a successful interpersonal and/or communicative exchange, and on the other hand, joking violates the principle of cooperation, which accounts precisely for successful interpersonal communication ... If one acknowledges the presence of a violation of the principle of cooperation, accounting for the communicative aspects of jokes becomes a problem automatically.

Attardo (1993: 543-544)

In fact, some other scholars also point out the inherent contradiction in CP, and developed alternative theories of pragmatics to address the problem (cf. Raskin 1985; Sperber & Wilson 1995). One of them is non-bona-fide communication.

2.3 Non-bona-fide Communication and SSTH/ GTVH

Raskin (1985) establishes a new layer of CP which is compatible with Grice’s principle, and at the same time admits the CP violation feature of humour. He supposes that Grice’s premise of the CP governs *bona-fide* (BF) communication. Under this communication mode, the hearer goes through the inference process as discussed above. Raskin (ibid.) then distinguishes a different mode of communication that is not governed by CP called *non-bona-fide* (NBF) communication. Lying, play acting and humour all belong to NBF mode. In the case of jokes, the speaker’s purpose is not to convey information but rather to “create a special effect with the help of the text, namely to make the hearer laugh” (Raskin, ibid.: 101). As for the hearer, he/she notices a CP violation immediately. Instead of suspending inferences, the hearer switches to the NBF mode and reinterprets the utterance as a joke. Hereupon, the hearer tunes in to the speaker. Such a shift from BF to NBF mode is actually very natural. As Raskin points out:

Humour seems to be the next most socially acceptable form of communication in our society after bona-fide communication [...] joke telling is a cooperative enterprise while lying is not

and, as a result, the latter is considered by the hearer only after the joke-telling option has been explored and rejected.

Raskin (1985: 104)

With the account of Grice's CP and Raskin's NBF as the base, we can continue to examine the most influential work in contemporary humour research which tries to provide a unified theory that is capable of handling humour at all linguistic levels. Raskin (1985) first puts forward the *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* (SSTH), which he later revises together with Attardo as the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Raskin and Attardo, 1994)³. The script is 'a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it' Raskin (1985: 81). It is a cognitive structure developed from the language speaker's common sense of routines, and individual background, experience and knowledge shared within a certain group. As Norrick (2003) puts it, '(script) goes far beyond what a standard dictionary entry normally contains'. These scripts are represented as graphs with lexical nodes and semantic links between the nodes.

Based on the concept of scripts, GTVH suggests a hypothesis in relation to jokes:

A text can be characterised as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the (following) conditions are satisfied:

The text is compatible, fully or part, with two different scripts

The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite.

Raskin (1985: 99)

In other words, according to GTVH, there are two opposite scripts overlapping within a joke. What should be noted is that what Raskin means by 'opposite' here is an abstract concept rather than an absolute contradiction. It can be considered at three levels. At the top is real vs. unreal. The second level contains actual vs. non-actual, normal vs. abnormal and the lowest includes good vs. bad, life vs. death and sex vs. non-sex. There exists in the text a 'semantic script-switch trigger' which forces the reader to switch from one script to the other, completing the process of a humorous effect. The switching passage is also one from BF to NBF mode. Raskin analyses the following joke as an example:

"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young

and pretty wife whispered in reply. “Come right in.”

Raskin (1985: 100)

The hearer here will be faced with a puzzle set up by two scripts. One is the routine knowledge inquiry from a patient to the DOCTOR. The other is aroused from the ambiguous description of ‘whisper’ and ‘young and pretty wife’ as a LOVER. DOCTOR vs. LOVER can be classified into the lowest level: sex vs. non-sex. The puzzle remains until the hearer reaches the punchline “come right in” and a switch from DOCTOR to LOVER, non-sex to sex is triggered, then everything is at last clear.

Although it is the first and only comprehensive semantic theory for humour analyses, SSTH was originally proposed only for humour in written text. Despite Attardo and Raskin’s later effort to extend its usage, the analysis of conversational humour is hardly affected by it, with the exception that Norrick (2003) attempts to apply GTVH to a spontaneous conversational pun. However, he immediately admits that much research needs to be done to develop GTVH to a unified theory for conversational humour. In my analysis of humour in university lectures, I will make an attempt to apply the theory and assess its compatibility.

2.4 Politeness Theory

Despite its contradiction, Grice’s theory of conversational implicature and the CP framework have given dramatic rise to the study of politeness since the 1970s. To date, Brown & Levinson’s politeness theory is still the most influential one, generating research in various social sciences.

There are some key concepts in Brown & Levinson’s politeness theory:

- Face: a social self-image that a member of the society wants to set up and maintain, the concept derives from Goffman’s (1971) notion of face;
- Positive face: the desire for the self-image to be approved;
- Negative face: the want to be autonomous and not impeded by others;
- Face-threatening acts (FTAs): threats to a social member’s face, e.g. orders, suggestions, criticisms, etc.

Every social member has both positive and negative face. One strives to keep his/her own social face, and at the same time to save others' face. However, face is always at risk because FTAs are impossible to avoid in daily life. Thus, social members develop politeness strategies to formulate messages in order to save the hearer's face. Brown & Levinson outline four main types of politeness strategies:

- Bald on record: the speaker abandons the want to minimise the threat to the hearer's face. This usually occurs under vast power difference or by communicators who have reached a certain kind of agreement for the sake of efficiency.
- Positive politeness: the speaker saves the hearer's positive face by showing approval or claiming the same wants and grounds. The strategy is most commonly used in situations where the communicators know each other fairly well. For example, one of two friends says to the other "let's get on with dinner", which indicates an inclusive 'we' in the utterance as a sign of common ground.
- Negative politeness: the speaker satisfies the hearer's negative-face wants and avoids being imposing. Showing respect for the hearer's ability to maintain autonomy, the speaker says "I know you've been sort of strapped for cash, but could I borrow £5?" This example is a very good illustration of negative politeness strategies.
- Off record strategy: the speaker allows more than one possible interpretation of his/her utterance. It's up to the hearer to decide which one to take. "It's getting cold in here" can be an indirect request for the hearer to shut the window.

Politeness strategies and the notion of face are widely adopted by researchers in analysing the function of humour. Attardo (1993) defines one of the social functions of humour, "decommitment", as avoiding loss of face. Brown & Levinson (1987) actually include different types of humour in their list of politeness strategies. "Joking is a basic positive-politeness technique" (ibid.: 124) as it can be used to stress shared backgrounds or values. Moreover, a number of rhetorical skills such as understatement/overstatement, irony and metaphor are also used in the indirect strategy of politeness. This is followed and developed by Holmes (2000) who points out and illustrates that use of humour can be both a positive

and negative politeness strategy.

However, Brown & Levinson (1987) understate the fact that humans do not always try to protect others' face. Speech acts are very often aggressive (Austin 1990). Besides, the validity of the notions of face and FTAs in non-European societies is constantly questioned by researchers (cf. Felix-Brasdefer 2006; Nwoye 1992; Gu 1990; Matsumoto 1988). Even within the same society, politeness is susceptible to various social variables. Brown & Levinson (1987) identify three independent sociological variables in politeness marking: social distance, social power and the degree of imposition associated with a FTA⁴:

- Social distance represents the level of intimacy between the speaker and hearer, which has a very complex impact on politeness. Wolfson (1989a, 1989b) and some later studies (Eisenstein & Bodman 1993; Olshtain & Weinbach 1993) interestingly conclude that the track along which social distance and politeness correlate is a reverse bell-shaped curve, or a “bulge”. In the middle of the bulge, familiar but not intimate relationships tend to be the most polite ones, while politeness decreases to both ends where intimacy and strangers lie.
- Social power consists of the speaker/ hearer's relative position in social hierarchies, age, gender, etc. (Kasper 1996). Brown & Levinson (1987) suggest that the greater the relative power of speaker over hearer, the less politeness is recommended. However, the correlation between social power and politeness is argued to be more dynamic than what they suggest. For example, Beebe & Takahashi (1993) find that Japanese speakers vary their politeness strategies dramatically depending on who has the current superior status; Harris (2003) studies British courtrooms and police stations and claims that people in high power position use heavily mitigated and redressive language when speaking to less powerful people.
- Degree of imposition associated with a FTA is the speaker's personal assessment of costs and benefits caused by a FTA.

In the context of university lectures, lecturers are generally at a higher power position than students. To investigate how humour contributes to such asymmetrical communication, politeness theory plays an important role in my analyses.

3. Methods of data collection and analysis

My overall research method in this dissertation will be pragmatics-informed discourse analysis of lectures recorded in a language corpus; simple quantitative analysis will also be performed to quantify the occurrence of humour. I have described in chapter 2 that my research is pragmatics-informed in the sense that pragmatic theories and concepts will form the basis of my analytic frameworks. In this chapter, I will continue to give a full account of my data collection and analysis methods.

3.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has a wide and varying reference, which makes it very difficult to define. Taylor (2001: 5) gives ‘a loose definition’: ‘discourse analysis is the close study of language in use’. She then contrasts ‘language in use’ with that in grammar books and dictionaries, and explains that discourse analysts are looking for patterns. Based on Taylor’s definition, a linguistic approach to humour study inevitably involves discourse analysis. Some humour research work purely with discourse, e.g. Attardo (1997, 2001), Attardo & Raskin (1991) and Yus (2003); the others triangulate their findings with ethnographic methods like interviews and participant observations, of which the projects of Janet Holmes and Jennifer Hay are typical examples. As I intend to conduct a linguistic study of humour, it becomes natural to consider discourse analysis as the basic method of data analysis.

3.2 Language corpora and the BASE corpus as the source of my research data

A corpus is a collection of written or transcribed spoken text in one or more than one language which can be explored in an automated fashion (Matthews, 2007a). The value of an extensive corpus is that it enables both micro and macro scale of empirical observations, with the support of computers, on language use in various contexts; as for a spoken corpus, such language use available for observations comes from authentic and natural speech events (Adolph & Carter 2007). The study of conversational humour would become nearly impossible merely relying on the researcher’s memory or scattered notes of daily conversations. Spoken corpora provide relatively instant and systematic data and evidence,

which then can save the time of duplicated data collection. Holmes' project draws a considerable number of examples from a corpus comprising 1,500 interactions recorded in twenty-two different workplaces (Holmes 2007). Carter's study on language creativity (Carter 1999, 2004; Carter & McCarthy 2004) uses data from the 5 million-word spoken corpus CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English), and his research interest in creativity was actually inspired when he was scrolling through CANCODE for another research focus (Carter 2004: 5).

The recordings and transcriptions used in this study come from the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus. The corpus was developed at the Universities of Warwick and Reading under the directorship of Hilary Nesi and Paul Thompson. Corpus development was assisted by funding from BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes), EURALEX (European Association for Lexicography), the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.⁵ It consists of 160 lectures and 40 seminars recorded in a variety of university departments. Holdings are distributed evenly across four broad disciplinary groups. These groups are: Arts and Humanities (AH), Social Studies and Sciences (SS), Physical Sciences (PS), and Life and Medical Sciences (LS). The lectures and seminars have been transcribed and tagged using a system devised in accordance with the TEI Guidelines⁶. The recording dated from October 1998 to March 2005. As discussed in the introduction, my main research objective is to discern forms and functions of humour in English university lectures. This will surely benefit from an empirical observation of a considerable amount of recorded English university lectures. The 160 lectures in BASE will thus become a felicitous data source for my research. Furthermore, to investigate whether humour is pervasive in English university lectures as raised in my second research question, I can also carry out quantitative analysis using figures summarised from BASE.

3.3 The limitations of using corpus data

The uses of computerised language corpora have often been considered critically by scholars (cf. Carter 1998; Cook 1998; Widdowson 2004). Cook (1998) points to some shortcomings of corpora as evidence of language use: firstly language corpora do not include the variety of perceptions of different audiences: individuals pay attention to and notice different things; secondly no corpus can include the complete variety of language an ordinary person

experiences in life: '[e]ven a three hundred million word corpus is equivalent to only around three thousand books, or perhaps the language experience of a teenager' (Cook *ibid.*:66). Cook's points stress the inherent limitations of using language corpora, which I bear in mind when I evaluate BASE as my data source in this section. His observations also relate to the general issue of subjectivity and validity in social research, of which I will carry out further considerations in section 4.2.2.

3.3.1. The reconstruction of non-verbal elements in the transcripts

As Adolphs & Carter (2007: 134) point out, communication is multimodal, by which they mean communication 'is embodied and combines both verbal and non-verbal elements'. To understand recorded communication requires the knowledge of non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, gestures, postures, and the layout of the recorded setting etc. They also call for integration in analysis of words, images and sound while admitting that most present spoken corpora 'do not... enable the representation and exploration of language and communication *beyond the textual*⁷'. As for my research interest, personal experience of attending lectures reminds me of the fact that lecturers constantly resort to non-verbal elements to create humorous effect. Transcripts in BASE record a certain number of nonverbal events, but whether they are adequate and consistent enough for my research requires testing. Moreover, there are video resources in BASE, but only 95 lectures have available video recordings. So problems of understanding non-verbal elements remain for the majority of the data. To make the best use of the resources in BASE, in my data analysis, if available, relevant video recordings will always be referred to. When no videos are available which may mitigate the quality of the analysis, I shall consider not using the data.

3.3.2. Contextual information in BASE

Conversations are seldom static as the speaker constantly refers to what exists out of the here and now (Maybin & Swann 2007: 514). It is self-evident that contextual knowledge is important in understanding the meaning of utterances. I pointed out in the literature review that humour is related to pragmatics and hence context-dependent, so having adequate contextual knowledge is important for decoding humour in interactions. The holding list of BASE provides contextual information including the name and gender of the lecturer, the subject and department of the lecture, and the type and number of the audience. However,

some background information such as the participant's age, ethnicity, education and intimacy between participants, which are considered as variables of humour in Hay (1995), is missing. This then may cause difficulties when I try to interpret and analyse the humorous utterance in the lectures.

Some ethnographic methods may be considered capable to solve the above issues. In the following section, I shall discuss them and explain why they are finally rejected.

3.4 Alternative methods and why they are not applied

In the first place, the above two limitations exemplify the shortcoming of using second-hand data. Obviously BASE was not specially built for my research interest, therefore its formats of recording and inclusion of contextual information cannot suit my requirements in every way. It may be suggested that these requirements can be better attained by tailored procedures of data collection and processing, and thus that I should collect my own data. Then again, my research in this dissertation is only concerned with some basic questions which in turn will initiate a PhD study. These questions involve the definition, forms and interactional functions of humour in lectures, which should benefit from extensive observation and analysis of real lectures. The large volume of data in BASE is hence preferable for my research. Although it has limitations, appropriate selection procedures should still allow me to acquire adequate valid samples. Of course, recording and transcribing lectures myself may provide suitable data, but as transcription is notoriously time-consuming, it may be fair to estimate that, in order to obtain the same amount of valid samples, collecting my own data would take more time than selecting from BASE. Based on this reason and also the fact that the time limit for this research is less than 5 months, I will use BASE instead of collecting my own data. However, in the future study, I will record and transcribe extra lectures for the purposes of comparing them with the BASE data and conducting multi-modal analysis.

In the second place, in order to acquire useful background information of the participants, two ethnographic methods, questionnaires and interviews, are considered good complementary methods. However, I decided to defer these due to the space and time constraints of this dissertation. Unless certain background information is vital to my analysis and has to be obtained with the complementary methods, I will not conduct questionnaires or

interviews.

3.5 Ethics

My application of the BASE data was granted full consent by its co-director Professor Hilary Nesi. Furthermore, I consulted Mr. John Oates, Chair of Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) of the Open University concerning the ethical considerations of my research. Mr. Oates considered it to be minimal risk research and hence not requiring ethics review by HPMEC. However, as stated in section 3.4, I intend to record my own data or perform interviews in my PhD., the ethical consideration will be more complicated which will involve obtaining consents from the participants, anonymity and arranging for new approval from HPMEC.

4. Coding Data: sample selection and categorisation of humour

4.1 Identifying humour in BASE

4.1.1. Defining humour

Defining humour is notoriously difficult. Attardo (1994: 1-13) assesses and attacks various historical attempts to define humour and questions the possibility of a comprehensive definition. His criticism mainly involves humour of scripted forms, but it reminds us of the potentially even harder challenge of defining humour in spontaneous conversations. This study of conversational humour is relatively new, and technology has only allowed compilation of large spoken corpora in the last decade (cf. Adolf & Carter 2007), so there is much to explore for this subject from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. In her study of gender and humour in conversations, Hay (1995: 5) notices the contradictions and inconsistencies between the existing definitions of humour in spoken contexts. She comes to the conclusion that different researchers should carefully clarify their terms so that comparisons and agreements can be achieved later. Holmes (2000) puts forward a definition which addresses the role of the analyst. This definition is again designed to suit her own project, and she admits its lack of comprehensiveness:

Incidences of humour included in this analysis are utterances which are identified by the analyst, on the basis of paralinguistic, prosodic and discoursal clues, as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some participants.

Holmes (ibid.: 163)

Both Hay and Holmes appear to adopt an inductive approach to defining humour: instead of developing standard definitions, they set up clear rules for identifying referents of humour in their database. Such elaboration of rules should enable comparisons, conciliations and finally standardisation in the long run. I decided to follow this approach for my research. In the following sections, I will demonstrate the detailed procedures for identifying and selecting samples of humour in BASE. In the process of data analysis, how these samples relate to humour will be re-examined.

4.1.2. Locating and extracting laughter tags in BASE

Most researchers, such as Coates (2007), Hay (1995, 1996), Holmes (2000) and Norrick (1993), draw on paralinguistic and prosodic cues in video or audio recordings to identify humour instances in conversations. This is an efficient but insufficient method: if the speaker's cues are considered, instances like dry humour, when the speaker jokes unmarkedly, will be excluded; if the hearer's cues are considered, instances of missed, misunderstood or simply dismissed humour will be excluded. To include instances without marked paralinguistic and prosodic cues, the only way is probably for the researcher to go over every single utterance and judge by certain features. This is time-consuming and susceptible to subjectivity. However for this dissertation, an efficient way to identify humour is considered essential, while I should be aware of what are missing in the samples for future investigations. Therefore, my research relied on paralinguistic cues to identify humour.

In BASE, iterated laughter is tagged as “laughter”, and different mark-ups distinguish laughter from collective participants and that from a single person. Using the corpus software Word Smith 5.0 (Scott 2007), 1116 tags of “<laughter>” were identified in the 160 lectures. I named these ***Laughter Tags*** (LTs). Considering that laughter is often triggered by humour, I decided to locate humour in BASE using the LTs. Two consequent problems of the sample

representation should be noted:

- Laughter only signals what Holmes (2000) calls ‘successful humour’ which the hearer appreciates and responds to.
- The cause of laughter is complicated since it involves linguistic, psychological and neurological factors. Many CA analysts have studied laughter in discourse. Although in some of their early work (Sacks 1972; Jefferson 1979; Tannen 1984; Sherzer 1985) laughter is seen as a close index of humour, Jefferson (1984) examines laughter in non-humorous contexts; Glenn (2003) emphasises the many other stimuli of laughter including socialising, nervousness, embarrassment etc. This problem stresses the importance of a close scrutiny of the extracts with LTs so as to select suitable samples for my research purposes.

4.1.3. Reducing the number of LTs

The 1116 LTs are clearly too large for a 5-month project, so it was necessary to reduce the data size. Based on a rough estimation balancing time and quality, I was expecting the final samples of humour to be around one hundred.

The audience in the BASE lectures are divided into six types: undergraduates (UG), postgraduates (PG), mixture of UG and PG; pre-sessional students, staff, and others. Table 4.1 displays the division of LTs in BASE by types of audience:

Audience type	No. of lectures	% in total lecture no.	No. of LTs	% in total LT no.
UG	104	65%	331	30%
UG/PG	25	14%	311	28%
PG	17	11%	296	27%
Staff	7	4%	86	8%
Others	4	4%	39	4%
Pre-sessional	3	2%	53	5%
Total	160	100%	1116	100%

Table 4.1 Division of LTs by audience types

A remarkable imbalance of LT numbers in lectures with different types of audience emerges in Table 4.1: the average number of LTs per lecture for UG is 3, while the numbers are much bigger for the rest: 13 (UG/PG); 17 (PG); 12 (Staff); 10 (Others) and 18 (Pre-sessional). Such a serendipitous discovery brought two main considerations to my research:

- First, if the imbalance represents a genuine distribution, the audience type may become a significant variable of laughter/humour⁸. However, social variables of humour were not my research interest in this dissertation, but they should be investigated in the future study.
- Second, the imbalance might be a result of inaccurate tagging. However, this seems a remote possibility because deliberate arrangement would be necessary to create such a patterned distribution. But BASE was built long before my study, with the laughter tagged without the transcribers’ knowledge of its specific use. During my research, I constantly checked the transcripts with their video recordings; no major mis-tag was noticed.

Staff and others lectures were firstly excluded to make sure that all my samples represented higher education. The remaining 991 LTs were spread over 149 lectures. To have a general idea of how often laughter occurred in these lectures, I summarised the number of lectures within different spans of LT numbers in Table 4.2.

No. of LTs (incl. the highest no.)	No. of lectures	%
NIL	55	37%
<=5	54	36%
5~10	13	9%
10~20	10	7%
20~30	8	5%
30~40	4	3%
40~50	2	1%
50~60	1	1%
60~70	2	1%
Total	149	100%

Table 4.2 Distribution of lecture no. within different spans of LT no.

Table 4.2 displays that over a third of the lectures do not contain LTs. However, as I discussed above, this did not mean that humour was absent in these lectures. For lectures containing LTs, the majority (36%) included one to five tags. First, I decided to limit my samples in this

span, which included 144 LTs, as they might represent the common occurrence of laughter. Second, to ensure having enough samples of humour after further selection, I added another 7 lectures from the next frequent span, each of which included 6 or 7 LTs, making the final numbers to be 192 LTs in 61 lectures.

4.1.4. Filtering out humorous episodes

The 192 LTs together with their contexts were then attentively read. Their video recordings, if available, were also watched. In this reading I filtered out LTs which were not considered to be humour-related. The following is a list of the major types of disqualified laughter⁹:

- Unclear utterance and events due to inaudible recordings, unfilmed visions and untranscribed non-verbal elements;
- Small incidents such as lights switching off and mobile phones ringing;
- Derisive laughter: the audience laughed at someone whom they disliked or could not take seriously of, e.g.:

- (1) L¹⁰: this is the cover of the Radio Times can you see that <pause> it's got Helen Baxendale

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct014)

- Anxiety releasing laughter, e.g.:

- (2) L: is that clear i'll take it slower

SL: <laughter>

(pslct015)

- Embarrassed laughter, e.g.:

- (3) L: i've got one wrong again people aren't # shall i start again <laughter>

(pslct007)

The number of the remaining LTs was 102. These LTs together with their contexts were then

extracted. After combining the consecutive LTs which occurred in the same events, 92 episodes were obtained. They were the final samples for my research and named *humour episodes* (HE).

4.2 Categorising forms of humour

It is necessary to develop systematic categorisation of humour. Maybin & Swann (2007) argue that everyday creativity is a form of art and advocate an evaluative and critical dimension in its analysis. Humour has long been closely connected to creativity (cf. Barsoux 1993; Holmes 2007; Murdock and Ganim 1993). In this respect, well-developed categorisation of humour will enable its evaluation and appreciation. Furthermore, categorisation is also required for cross-cultural comparison of humour. However, Norrick (1993: 15, 2003: 1338) argues that it is impossible to clearly distinguish the different forms of conversational humour because they fall into points along a continuum. One reason for this problem probably relates to the fact that, as Attardo (2001) claims, the terms of ‘humour, irony, and other playful forms’ are mostly folk-concepts. Despite this, there are various attempts at classifying humour. For humour in written texts, Attardo (1997, 2001), Curcó (1995, 1996a, b, 1998) and Yus (2003) propose similar ways of classification. However, their compatibility with conversational humour is doubtful; Holmes & Marra (2002b), Norrick (1993) and Hay (1995) all attempt functional means of categorising conversational humour which suit their own data. As such, their taxonomies are much attached to the contexts they are researching including workplace and conversations between family members and friends. Communication patterns in these contexts are very different from university lectures considering the number of participants, their power relations, and purposes of conversations etc. One key feature of the latter is that lecturers dominate the communication and exchanges of conversations are comparatively rare. Based on these considerations, I decided to develop my own categorisation scheme. In this section, I will document my attempt to discover, summarise and classify some generic components generating humour in the BASE lectures so as to set up trial categorisation for my long term study.

4.2.1. Categorical approach and its rationale

The study of humour is an interdisciplinary subject, and its categorisation for analysis should

be multi-dimensional. Maybin & Swann (2007) suggest a three-dimensional approach to analyse language creativity:

- Textual: intrinsic linguistic forms including properties of words, modes and genres;
- Contextual: sociohistorical and interpersonal contexts surrounding the creative language;
- Critical: creativity is subjected to evaluation and criticism; creativity emerges at critical moments when socially difficult utterance such as challenging authority is taking place.

These three dimensions can also be applied in humour study. Textual properties are usually distinct in humorous utterances especially in some mostly studied types such as punning and repetition. As for contextual properties, Maybin & Swann (ibid.) emphasise that the quantity of contextual information that a researcher should investigate and reveal is an unsolved issue. The inexhaustible and diverse contextual details of each HE makes it impractical to draw similarities, while they are better referred to when necessary in the discourse analysis. Finally, critical properties are typical in teasing and irony. However, the abstract concept of ‘critical’ needs to be pinned down to certain measurement. So I decided to apply *face* in politeness theory to classify humour’s critical dimension.

4.2.2. The coding process and its limitations

With the purpose to build up a multi-dimensional framework, I repeatedly examined, coded and re-coded the HEs. For each HE, two types of notes were made of its textual and critical features. All notes within each type were then compared, using discourse analysis inspired by the theories discussed in chapter 2, to discover common characters which were then highlighted, summarised and titled. As a result, four perspectives were perceived and constructed as the frames to categorise forms of humour in the HEs: meanings of utterances; phrases and words; register and face acts. The first three corresponded to the textual dimension while face acts to the critical dimension. Under each of the frames, generic features of the HEs were drawn. Meanwhile, it also struck me that a number of HEs displayed certain incongruous features and their forms under the four frames should be discussed separately. I shall explain them in detail in section 4.2.3.

Apart from the above consideration, when available, humour types widely discussed in written humour and narrative/canned jokes were also used to label the HEs, e.g. irony,

anecdotes, joke-telling, joking and parody. However I did not intend to rely on them to categorise humour in my research, but simply hoped to obtain a rough idea of how compatible they were to the HEs.

It is well-acknowledged that the validity of any social research suffers from the researcher's biographies and subjectivities (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007), and bias-free interpretations are impossible (Eisner 1993). For discourse analysis, one way to lessen the risk of subjectivity in coding is to have multiple coders. However, for this research, this was suspended because of the time and space limit. I fully acknowledge the influence of my subjectivity upon the process and findings of this research, and I stress that, as this is exploratory research for a long term study, both its methods and subsequent findings will be subject to future triangulation, such as using multiple coders.

4.2.3. Generic forms of humour

● Meanings of utterance

Some types of scripts, rising from either the literal meaning or implicature of utterances, are prone to trigger humour. Four of such types were summarised from the HEs.

Absurdity

Ridiculous, illogical or silly utterances often successfully triggered laughter in the HEs, especially in the instance of joking¹¹.

In example 4, the lecturer was introducing a French historian's book which talked about peasants in the 14th century picking nits off each other:

- (4) L: this a sign of sort of close affection and he's got wonderful things about mothers sort of you know just talking to the neighbour sort of going through their children's hair, but then this also lovers in bed are sort of like sorting through each other's, # bodies sort of like, picking the nits off, don't try it it's it's likely to bring you enemies rather than friends i assure you

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct029)

- (5) L: because only one person in two-hundred is actually going to get hepatitis B so you're going to be vaccinating a hundred-and-ninety-nine children for no reason whatsoever course what you'd like to do is to walk into a classroom at the age of children at the age of

five and say right all those of you who are going to use intravenous drugs when you're older

SS: <laughter>

L: and have more than five sexual partners a year could you please put your hand up and we'll vaccinate you

(lslct018)

Authority talk

In five HEs, the lecturers' utterances were associated with authority talk such as rules of activities or controls over class discipline. Although lecturers are supposedly privileged to such talk, it seemed to have become a funny topic especially when the lecturers 'foresaw' students' misbehaviours.

- (6) L: as i say you'll present your poster to all the other people i want each of you then to mark, or give assessments of everybody else's things, now this is not for you to be nasty to each other

SL: <laughter>

L: and it's no good then saying everybody's is an A, i want you to be realistic

(lslct001)

- (7) L: well the only advantage from my point of view is that i'll have on camera¹² those of you that have fell fallen asleep

SS: <laughter>

(lslct012)

Earnestness

Fox's (2005) 'not being earnest' rule can find examples in the HEs. Earnestness was often the subject to be laughed at. For example, in the following two episodes the lecturers talked about enthusiastic behaviour which caused laughter.

In example 8, the lecturer referred to his behaviour in the last lecture on French revolution. It is also an episode of parody in which the style of a piece of art (writing, music, acting, etc.) is deliberately imitated in order to be amusing.

- (8) L: you may have noticed i was sort of getting rather #, enthusiastic and carried away at the end of the last one i was sort of almost # like i sort of started at the beginning about

someone standing on a coffee table and shouting to arm citizens, as if i was going to sort of, leap up on the desk and say to arms let's storm, the Rootes Social Building

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct020)

- (9) L: okay i'll i'll begin then, and # just for a bit of atmosphere if you feel you want to break into spontaneous applause

SS: <laughter>

L: throw flowers cheers of bravo, rush up for my autograph any of that feel free

(ahlct032)

Repression

The humour of repression is more of a psychological and cultural concept. Raskin (1985: 23) describes repression as “chafing at restraints”. Under certain social norms, the individual's freedom is repressed. Joking about the repression becomes an acceptable way to release awkwardness. It is constantly exemplified in jokes about sex and politics. In different societies and different periods of time, its implication varies. Some of my English informants suggested that in the English society sex, alcohol and bodily functions are frequent topics in conversational jokes. Surprisingly, repression turned out to be a very usual form of humour in the HEs. There were twenty instances which entail a wide range of topics:

- Sex (9 examples)

- (10) L: i think, the fissures are opening up <pause> let me start, let me start at the top <takes off jumper> sorry i'm not just going # it sounds like i'm doing a striptease

SS:<laughter>

L: if i don't take my # pullover <inaudible> which wasn't the intention at all, #, let's start with the king

(ahlct020)

- (11) L: in early modern times, his motto for what he was doing was labour ipse voluptas, meaning work itself is pleasure, with the kind of hint that word voluptas if any of you sort of done Latin, will know that it means sort of kind of pleasure of an almost sort of erotic and sexual kind, you may or may not wish to relate that to the fact that he didn't actually get married till he was forty-eight

SS: <laughter>

L: and he used to write letters to his brother, about caressing documents in the archives,

SS: <laughter>

L: as if they were loved ones

(ahlct024)

Example 11 is also an anecdote.

- Bodily functions (4 examples)

- (12) L: where the character # basically is suffering from # constipation because he's eaten too many bananas

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct017)

- (13) L: also remember to, start getting in the habit of using urine, and filtrate in the right, # context, urine is only urine

SS: <laughter>

(lslct026)

- Alcohol (2 examples)

- (14) L: sometimes when we're writing assignments we think you know # what's the point of all this # so what you do is to get the whisky bottle out and have another drink don't you

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct017)

- Censorship (1 example)

- (15) L: here comes the the little bit from Grisbi¹³ which you did not see this morning thanks to the British censor of the fifties

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct016)

The above HE is also an instance of irony: a way of using words that are the opposite of what the speaker means.

- Death (1 example)

- (16) L: yeah i know but if you're a novice you'll be thinking oh right # child right, clutch down, brake hard splat <laughter>

S: <inaudible>

L: dead child <laughter>, yes <laughter>

(ahlct036)

This example is also a typical illustration of so called dark humour.

- General: mixture of the above or other repressed subjects (2 examples)

- (17) L: complex perceptions, what kind of complex perceptions are you having right now, # actually no i don't want to know about some of them

SS: <laughter>

L: but are there a— any you want to share

(ahlct037)

● Phrases and words

In this form of humour, a particular word or phrase in the utterance triggers the effect. Various types of wordplays can be classified into this form.

Punning

Although punning is a popular topic in written humour (cf. Attardo 1994; Sacks 1972; Sherzer 1978, 1993; Sobkowiak 1991), it was only noticed three times in the HEs. Two of them were simply incidental puns. Example 10 was one of them with 'top' as the pun.

Ambiguity

In example 17, when the lecturer said 'I don't want to know about some of them' the word 'some' was an intentional ambiguous use of the word.

Hyperbole

The idea of being earnest in example 9 was marked by constant uses of exaggerated words:

- (9) L: okay i'll i'll begin then, and # just for a bit of atmosphere if you feel you want to break into *spontaneous applause*¹⁴

SS: <laughter>

L: throw *flowers cheers of bravo, rush up for my autograph* any of that feel free

(ahlct032)

Metaphor

- (18) L: now when Marx is brought up as a topic # i'm wheeled out as one of the surviving *dinosaurs* as it were in the department, # most of the remaining Marxists either being dead or long departed or have become Liberal Democrats

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct025)

Except for the above major types, I also noticed infrequent uses of tautology and metonymy in the HEs.

● **Register**

All examples under this frame belong to incongruous humour which I will discuss in the later section.

● **Face acts**

Speech acts of *face* are ubiquitous in the HEs, with teasing as the most significant form. Teasing and self-teasing were noticed in 41 HEs, which involved the lecturers teasing themselves, the students, their colleagues or the people they were teaching. For examples and detailed analyses of teasing and self-teasing please see chapter 5.

4.2.4. Forms of incongruous humour

Ritchie (2004: 46) claims that '[if] there is one generalisation that can be extracted from the literature about humour, it is that humour involves *incongruity*'. GTVH foregrounds this feature by its description of the switch between two incongruous scripts. Some research on conversational humour also broadly discuss incongruity (cf. Norrick 1993; Partington 2006). The review of HEs informed that some of them entailed two salient incongruous scripts, and their coexistence dominated the formation of the humorous effect. I named them as *incongruous humour episodes* (IHE). In total, 36 IHEs were coded.

● Meanings of utterance

Two objects, events or ideas, which usually have remote association, exist in the same utterance, e.g.:

- (19) L: you can think about X and Y as being anything you like <pause> okay it could be # it could be that, the two things which you think of as giv-, as giving you a lot of happiness over which you have preferences, are, #, new clothes and C-Ds, or it might be, economics lectures and accountancy lectures

SS: <laughter>

L: anything you like

(pslct016)

For students, sitting through lectures contrasts with the idea of happiness that is usually associated with CDs and new clothes. The lecturer was aware of and made use of such a contrast. Example 19 is also an irony.

- (20) L: the westerly jets that we get in mid-latitudes are because of the Coriolis force, causing this air to swerve to the right <pause> so this is the same reason if you were to shoot a polar bear its have its two eyes would be there <pause> you'd fire at that eye and then the thing would swerve a bit and <laughter>, always remember this if you're shooting polar bears <laughter>

(pslct027)

In example 20, the lecturer illustrated the Coriolis effect with shooting a polar bear, which itself seemed an absurd idea.

● Phrases and words

The incongruous scripts were embodied by a particular word or phrase in the utterance which then triggers humour.

The pun of 'top' in example 10 is a typical illustration. The lecturer was originally talking about the French revolution and intending to analyse the fissures from the *top* of the social structure which turned into a serendipitous pun when he tried to take off his pullover. Except for punning, in the next example, the metonymical term 'Coca-cola' juxtaposed the ordinary product with the solemn idea of imperialism forming an interesting wordplay. However, the term was used as a canned-joke here instead of rising from the lecturer's creation.

- (21) L: poor countries of the peripheral parts of the world are thereby robbed of their chance to develop tastes and lifestyles autonomously instead they become imitative artificially stimulated in their tastes values aspirations by outside models and processes this is a process nicely known as Coca-cola imperialism

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct019)

● Register

Register is a cluster of features of speech or writing on a certain occasion or of a certain group of people (cf. Halliday 1978; Hasan & Halliday 1989). Attardo (1994: 230) discusses register humour ‘caused by an incongruity originating in the clash between two registers’. Lecture talk as happens in a classroom is a type of institutional discourse (cf. Arminen 2005; Drew & Heritage 1992) which ‘is normally informed by goal orientations of a relatively restricted conventional form’ (Drew & Heritage *ibid.*: 22). With this account, informal register in the lecturer’s utterance, such as swear words, is likely to generate humour. For example:

- (22) L: Running, at the enemy, firing as they go, basically, frightening the shit out of the #

SS: <laughter>

L: the enemy

(ahlct020)

Example 23 demonstrates that the lecturer suddenly switched his topic and started to mimic the students:

- (23) L: okay we’ll talk more about Baxendale in the seminars <pause> <laughter> there’s a sort of a sigh of

SS: <laughter>

L: <mimicking voice> oh no

(ahlct014)

● Face acts

The IHEs demonstrate how dynamic face acts can be in practice as they feature incongruous face acts clashing and eliciting laughter. For example, a bald on record self-teasing is used to save one’s face; overtly flattering someone’s positive face is actually teasing this person or

‘alluring’ him/her to some action. Two examples were simply listed here. Detailed analysis can be found in chapter 5.

Self-teasing

(24) L: that was a joke actually so you were supposed to laugh then

SS: <laughter>

L: okay not a good actor i'm afraid

(ahlct017)

Example 24 also illustrates metahumour, or ‘joke about joke’, in which the lecturer poked fun at his failed humour.

Flattering

(25) L: let me repeat the question and then i'm interested if any of you can now provide an answer you are now you've had fifteen weeks of statistics so you're all semi-statisticians

SS: <laughter>

(pslct002)

5. Discourse analysis: functions of humour in BASE lectures

Two general functions of language are proposed or adapted by a number of scholars (Brown & Yule 1983; Holmes 1995; Kasper 1990; Koester 2006; Partington 2006; Lakoff 1989). The first is *transactional* use which is to convey information, facts or content; the other one is *relational* or *interactional* use which aims to express and maintain social relationships. These two functions are usually mixed in daily conversations as Brown & Yule (ibid.: 1) point out that few language exchanges are simply used to fulfil one function. Institutional discourse is firstly transactional: knowledge delivery and absorbance are the primary tasks of lecture talk. Meanwhile universities as social organisations render lectures as one of the interactional contexts for lecturers and students. Through reviewing and analysing the HEs, versatile functions of humour in the BASE lectures were noticed. Due to the word limit, this chapter will be focused on investigating the interactional functions of humour, and transactions will be introduced simply as the contextual information in the discourse analysis. It is also worth pointing out that humour episodes, as all other utterances, are multi-functional (Holmes 2000: 166). Nonetheless, although I made effort to reflect the various functions of humour in my

analyses, usually emphasis would be placed on the one that was presently being elaborated.

5.1 Interactional functions of humour in the BASE lectures

Four major interactional functions of humour were summarised from the samples:

- Establishing, maintaining and improving one's *face*

The notion of *face* implies that a social member has to make effort to establish, maintain and improve his/her self-images. Although different people expect different self-images, some basic needs are shared. Partington (2006: 97-98) claims that people appear to have 'two principal sorts of positive face: a competence and an affective face'. He explains that the former refers to people's need to be seen as competent and authoritative, while the latter to be seen as congenial and non-threatening to other group members; these two sorts of *face* are not always compatible. I argue that good usage of humour boosts both sorts of *face*, in the context of teaching, as it signals the competence of manipulating knowledge and conveying it in a relaxed way. In this sense, establishing, maintaining and improving *face* can be seen as the default intention in attempts of humour, which may echo what Maybin & Swann (2007) suggest, citing from Bauman (1992), the performative potential of all communicative acts. The HEs, as humour successfully eliciting laughter, provide resourceful evidence of this point.

- Establishing rapport

Research into conversational humour, from functional analyses like Norrick (1993), Glenn (2003) and Everts (2003) to quantitative analyses like Holmes' project, proves the important function of humour in establishing rapport (Attardo, 2005). This is certainly the case in the BASE lectures. Its ubiquity in the 92 HEs makes it an important consideration throughout the discourse analysis.

- Releasing embarrassment

Jefferson (1984a, 1984b) describes how laughter defuses seriousness in talk about troubles. In

the case when the speaker has stupidly trapped himself/herself into an awkward situation, making a humorous speech to generate laughter is a skilful way to divert attention, defuse seriousness and bring the situation to an end.

- Indirect request and demand

Humour as a politeness strategy has been discussed in chapter 2. Many other researchers before Brown & Levinson (1987) had actually realised this function of humour. Goffman (1955) discusses it as a means of stress-reduction, and Wilson (1979) as a means of hostility-reduction. We will see examples of how lecturers expressed requests to the students.

5.2 Discourse analysis: how humour functions interactionally in the BASE lectures

5.2.1. Humour for the sake of one's *face*

- (26) L1: well i'll just begin by a a slight sort of #, introduction when i arrived at <name of university> # what seems like a lifetime ago but was only thirty-one years ago in nineteen-sixty-eight, # i would think probably about forty per cent of the members of staff, were, Marxists E P Thompson of course was the the doyen of the # of Marxist British Marxist historians and was was here in the social history centre, and a straw poll conducted amongst # first year basic one students in a lecture in nineteen-sixty-nine, revealed that something like forty per cent of the students # saw themselves as either Marxist or sympathetic to Marxism, #, times have obviously changed and # now when Marx is brought up as a topic # i'm wheeled out as one of the surviving dinosaurs as it were in the department, # most of the remaining Marxists either being dead or long departed or have become Liberal Democrats

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct025)

Example 26 occurred at the opening of the first of a serial lecture on Karl Marx's text. In less than 200 words, L1 conveyed two main points: the decline of Marxism in history and his appointment to teach this subject. This transaction-based talk was enriched by witty humour which generated laughter. L1's competence and affective face were both established:

The context indicated that this was the first time L1 met the students. It could be assumed that

the social expectation of a scholar, and the remote social and power distance between lecturers and students had shaped the students' imagination of L1's *face*. L1 broke the ice by poking fun at himself as a dinosaur: a Marxist in a bygone age of Marxism. Moreover, he explained his teaching appointment as simply the case that the department had no other choice. By doing so, L1 instantly shortened his distance with the students, and established an amiable image. Meanwhile, such an understatement did not undermine L1's competence face: firstly, 'the surviving dinosaur' as a metaphor violated the maxim of quality and led to the audience's awareness of a NBF play mode; within this mode, one should not take L1's self-teasing as a real intention to degrade himself. Secondly, L1's anecdote of the straw poll in 1969 and the sarcastic juxtaposition of Marxists turning Liberal Democrats reflected his extensive knowledge of Marxism, which justified him as the best person for the role. Therefore L1's competence face was actually enhanced.

Example 26 is an illustration of how humour establishes *face* in lectures. There are plenty of examples among the HEs in which humour maintains or improves *face*. Example 4 is one of them:

- (4) L: this a sign of sort of close affection and he's got wonderful things about mothers sort of you know just talking to the neighbour sort of going through their children's hair, but then this also lovers in bed are sort of like sorting through each other's, # bodies sort of like, picking the nits off, don't try it it's it's likely to bring you enemies rather than friends i assure you

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct029)

In this episode, L2 introduced one book to illustrate the taught historian's works. He chose and delivered an interesting book on peasants in the 14th century, and then swiftly developed its story into a NBF mode to joke about the students picking nits off each other. The class then shared the same laughter and enhanced their solidarity as a group. Furthermore, the lecturer was appreciated as capable to manipulate his knowledge to create laughter.

5.2.2. Humour to release embarrassment diplomatically

Example 27 contains a long exchange between the lecturer and one student during a pre-session lecture on the EU (European Union) and EMU (Economic and Monetary Union).

- (27) 1 S1: what do you think about the relationship between European Union and the
2 (mondial) organisation of commerce (or) this O-M-C, the G-A-T-T or <pause>
3 L4: and # and W-T-O and things like that
4 S1: yeah
5 SS: <laughter>
6 L4: do you do you do you have a more specific version of that question #, i i
7 S1: #
8 L4: i feel myself,
9 S1: just-
10 L4: -i feel myself being drowned more and more out of out of my depth
11 SS: <laughter>
12 L4: but but but see whether you can-
13 S1: { -just just
14 L4: { pin me down a bit more
15 S1: can you talk about the problem with the Third World <pause> # with
16 with the the European Union
17 L4: yes
18 S1: and (inaudible) with # with (inaudible) products and, so what so what i'd like to
19 know if, the European Union will be will have problems, with this agreement, with
20 trade agreements-
21 L4: -trade agreements,
22 S1: yeah with, with the the, the Uruguay rounds-
23 L4: -yeah,
24 S1: please
25 L4: yeah, okay, you wouldn't be by any chance, beginning the M-A in, International
26 Political Economy would you?
27 SS: <laughter>

- 28 L4: because that's the sort of question which people will be spending #, a large
 29 amount of time discussing, #,
 30 SS: <laughter>
 31 L4: i i i i confess to being not very well informed, on the on on the on the details, and
 32 they are very important matters of the relationship between the European Union, and
 33 the World Trade Organization
- (sslct024)

S1 raised a question during which he had difficulty in naming some organisations. He was stuck after 'GATT' (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), which actually had been replaced by WTO (World Trade Organisation) in 1994. L4 then continued S1's organisation list with WTO, followed by finishing S1's question with a vague phrase, 'things like that' in line 3. At face value, L4 was helping S1, which was immediately confirmed by S1 himself in line 4. But the whole class burst into laughter as they sensed the hidden face act signalled by L4's intentional use of ambiguity and mimicking tone. This hidden layer was to mock the generality of S1's question, naturally followed by L4 asking S1 to specify his question. At this point, L4 was faced with a complex enquiry which could threaten his competence face. He dealt with this crisis with humour in lines 8-10, he described his situation metaphorically as being drowned. This betrayal to the reality violated quality. With its context, the students could easily infer L4's real meaning: 'the question was too broad for me to answer'. This was admitting incompetence and could be embarrassing, but the dramatic but vivid metaphor led to a bout of laughter and effectively dwarfed the embarrassment. In the meantime, L4 avoided threatening S1's positive face by not criticising his question directly. S1 tried to reframe his question in line 12-24, to which L4 did not provide a straight answer. Instead, he returned with a tag question of S1's academic subject. This digression to a seemingly irrelevant topic interrupted the flow of the current exchange pattern. L4 flouted the maxim of relevance, which, with the tag question, implied that S1 had asked a question outside of L4's profession. Furthermore, by relating S1's question to what master degree learners would spend a long time discussing, S1's positive face was saved or even flattered. From line 31, L4 switched back to the transaction of the exchange and confessed that he was not 'well informed' on the enquired upon issue. After the frequent tension-relieving laughter prior to this confession, such a bold threat to L4's face did not sound too abrupt.

Example 29 was only one of the many episodes in BASE in which humour was applied as a strategy to tackle embarrassment. It should be pointed out that, in these episodes, humour seemed to be the default exit for the lecturers in moments when losing face was unavoidable.

5.2.3. Humour as versatile face acts

Face acts was put forward as a significant dimension of humour in the BASE lectures in chapter 4. I have analysed above how humour benefits the speaker's *face*. In this section, I would like to focus on humour's functions as FTAs, especially in teasing and self-teasing. I argue that, based on the HEs, the interactional functions of teasing and self-teasing are dynamic and paradoxical as they constantly produce opposite interpretations with equal salience; when the FTAs are directed at others, the level of intimacy between the speaker and hearer decides its level of offensiveness.

Teasing others: a versatile paradox

There are two aspects to teasing others. One is that it is a potential threat to the positive face if it is taken seriously. If the speaker does not mean it, cues from tones, facial expressions, repetitions or exaggeration should be given as signals. Second, much psychological and linguistic research has proved that teasing is a way to display common values, and rapport is built through sharing laughter and the message that the act of teasing communicates (Baxter 1992; Eisenberg 1986; Norrick 1993). In a word, teasing is paradoxical:

Teasing criticizes yet compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection.

(Keltner et al., 2001)

Such a paradoxical type of humour turned out to be the most frequently used form of humour in the HEs. Let me explore the versatility of teasing according to its different targets.

The next episode entails teasing a third party who had no direct contact with anyone present:

- (28) L5: in early modern times <pause> his motto for what he was doing was, labour ipse voluptas, meaning work itself is pleasure, with the kind of hint that word voluptas if any of you sort of done Latin, will know that it means sort of kind of pleasure of an almost sort of erotic and sexual kind, you may or may not wish to relate that to the fact that he didn't actually get married till he was forty-eight,

SS: <laughter>

L5: and he used to write letters to his brother, about caressing documents in the archives,

SS: <laughter>

L5: as if they were loved ones

(ahlct024)

In this episode, L5 delivered anecdotes about the German historian Ranke. The repressed humour was targeted at the historian teasing at his seemingly abnormal sexual orientation to books. It was very unlikely that this FTA would affect anyone present, while the joy of sharing laughter enhanced the rapport between L5 and the students.

Example 29 contains one lecturer teasing another lecturer in the same department:

- (29) L6: since i watched the tape of Peter's¹⁵ lecture, i don't know if any of you remember one of you in the room must, # i'm supposed to take my glasses on and off

SS: <laughter>

L6: all the time, right, i've not i noticed after you told Peter that that he i don't think he put his glasses on once

SL: <laughter>

(ahlct022)

In this episode, L6 was referring to his colleague Peter's lecture which had also been recorded for the BASE project. In Peter's lecture, one of the students, who was also present in the current one, revealed that L6 had a habit of constantly taking his glasses on and off. By mentioning this incidence, L6 took the risk of being laughed at again; but when he pointed out that Peter did not even put on his glasses as if he had been too concerned with his image, L6 appeared to be taking an 'counter attack'. As such L6 laughed at himself first, and then generated more laughter by teasing back. This episode demonstrated that, even though lecturing was mainly a unidirectional and institutional talk, lecturers could still poke fun at each other.

In example 30, both L7 and L8 were in the classroom:

- (30) L7: the first thing i want to talk about, is the staff, who are going to be running this particular class, # you know me i'm <name> my colleagues over there ... <name of L8> he has a nickname

SS: <laughter>

L7: which i'm going not going to release to you, you may find out later

(lslct010)

In the above two episodes, the power distribution between the teasing and the teased was symmetrical. The atmosphere in the departments and intimacy between the lecturers were the keys to reducing the threat of the teasing. It should also be noted that L6 started his FTAs by teasing himself, and he also signalled an NBF mode with 'i don't know if any of you remember *one* of you in the room must': his uncertainty was violating the apparent fact that the students remembered the incident in Peter's lecture. By doing so the threat was effectively mitigated.

The following example shows how a FTA at high risk of offence was performed in an asymmetrical power exchange:

- (31) L9: it may be in Dublin dear boy but it's minus-infinity in the rest of the world

SS: <laughter>

(pslct020)

In example 31, L9 was responding to one student who had insisted that the log of zero was zero as he learned it in a university in Dublin. L9 responded with a bold on record FTA. The sudden change of register as calling the student 'dear boy' caused a burst of laughter. Although the audience were amused, it was likely that the teased student felt embarrassed or even offended. But L9's higher power position and the truth of the knowledge made such a threat 'affordable'.

Self-teasing and self-deprecation

Comparing to teasing directed to others, self-teasing is less risky, and at the same time it benefits the reputation of the speaker as someone who is able to laugh at himself/herself. As I suggested in section 4.2.3, FTAs towards oneself often do not undermine one's *face*. In daily interactions, self-teasing is more usual amongst speakers who are of higher social status:

- (24) L10: it would help if my pen worked... that was a joke actually so you were supposed to laugh then

SS: <laughter>

L10: okay not a good actor i'm afraid

(ahlct017)

In this example L10's white board marker did not work, and he delivered what he called 'a joke' which turned flat. Instead of ignoring it which probably would not cause any embarrassment, he commented on the failed humour, i.e. metahumour, and committed inability to act. To understand this episode, more context would be necessary. As I reviewed its video recording, I noticed that this episode happened more than halfway through the lecture; before this, the audience were very quiet and unresponsive. As such, the marker pen not working might have made L10 more embarrassed. In order to relax his nerves and break the ice, he started self-teasing, which succeeded in generating laughter. It is worth mentioning that after this HE, three more bouts of laughter occurred. In this respect, the self-teasing in this episode did not undermine, but saved the lecturer's competence face.

Example 8 is another episode of self-teasing:

- (8) L: you may have noticed i was sort of getting rather # enthusiastic and carried away at the end of the last one i was sort of almost # like i sort of started at the beginning about someone standing on a coffee table and shouting to arms citizens as if i was going to sort of leap up on the desk and say to arms let's storm the Rootes Social Building

SS: <laughter>

(ahlct020)

Again, it should be stressed that, in the two episodes here and other HEs with self-teasing, the NBF mode was always signalled. Example 24 was a 'joke about joke'; example 8 was a parody which as a whole was a violation of quality. One may then argue that without giving

cues to an NBF mode, self-teasing can be seen as lack of confidence and destructive of one's competence face.

Self-deprecation has a very similar function to self-teasing in so far as they both have the effect of narrowing social distance. The subtle difference between the two is that one may tease oneself for doing something stupid, but one deprecates oneself not because one is really incapable, but conversely, because one has achieved a certain success. Example 26 is a good illustration of self-deprecation, from which again we can see degrading one's face actually helps to improve it.

Explicit flattering

- (25) L11: let me repeat the question and then i'm interested if any of you can now provide an answer you are now you've had fifteen weeks of statistics so you're all semi-statisticians

SS: <laughter>

(pslct002)

- (32) L12: jump diffusion what's jump diffusion

<pause>

L12: where are, the mathematicians <pause> what's jump diffusion?

(pslct040)

Example 25 and 32 contain very similar form of humour in which the lecturers exaggeratingly boasted the students' academic levels. The purpose of this was to encourage volunteers to answer questions and boost a more active atmosphere in class. In this respect, the *face* flattering was actually a strategy to impose FTAs.

6. Findings and implications

This research began with the wish to bring attention to and elicit future exploration of humour in English university lectures. At the end when I looked back to the initial research questions, I found that, although not all of them had been satisfactorily resolved, some other

interesting findings emerged. The following points may be taken as a summary of this research:

- Defining humour is problematic. Its definition diverges in the literature according to different purposes of research. Even if there was a well-acknowledged definition, immense problems exist in the selection of humour instances from authentic conversations. My research followed an inductive approach to defining humour which set up detailed procedures in identifying its referents in BASE.
- Following my selection procedures, 92 instances of humour were obtained out of 149 lectures. One may argue that these numbers show scarce instances of humour in BASE and therefore question the significance of doing this research. However, it should be borne in mind that I chose laughter as an efficient cue to identify humour, which meant that my samples could not be a complete representation of humour in the BASE lectures. Therefore this research could not answer the question of how pervasive humour is in English university lectures in BASE. This underlines the necessity for future study to include more comprehensive searches of humour in the BASE data, and ethnographic methods to test the prevalence of humour in academic settings.
- I set up a trial multi-dimensional categorical framework which entails textual and critical properties of humour in the BASE lectures. Based on this some generic forms of humour in the samples were summarised (Please see Table 6.1). I distinguished from others a group of samples with incongruous humour as they displayed a switch or clash of scripts within the four frames and presented unique humour effects. However, I admit that my categorisation is not satisfactory and needs improvement in the future.

Meanings of utterance	Phrases & words	Register	Face acts
Absurdity	Punning	Clashes of registers (only in	Teasing
Authority talk	Ambiguity	IHEs):	Self-teasing
Earnestness	Hyperbole	Lecturers saying swear	Self-deprecation
Repression:	Metaphor	words	Flattering
Sex	Mimicking		
Bodily functions	Metonymy	Lecturers mimicking	
Alcohol	Tautology	students	
Censorship	Taboo		
Death			
General			

Table 6.1 Generic forms of humour in the BASE lectures

It should be noted that that any HE may fall into more than one of the forms in this table, which is the natural result of the multi-functional nature of humour utterances.

- Four major interactional functions of humour were noticed, which depicted humour as a versatile means to benefit self-image and rapport, to tackle critical moments of face loss and to encourage students’ active participation in class. Face was the ubiquitous subject of the application of humour, but it could also lead to negative effects; in my examples, the lecturers constantly made effort to mitigate the potential negative effects. However, my analysis might reflect merely one among the many ways of interpreting the data. Moreover, they tended to give a positive view of humour in lectures. This was due to the fact that my samples were regarded as successful humour. Further research should also investigate the negative aspects of it.
- This research raised my awareness of the complexity of studying humour in English university lectures which surpassed my original expectation. The lack of existing research on this subject indicates that the investigation needs to be started ab initio. Research on humour in inter-cultural communication potentially involves dealing with complex and interrelated variables regarding culture, contexts and subjectivities. Therefore, it is necessary to narrow down my future study to one or two major foci. Suitable research methods need to be designed. I shall combine BASE with my own corpus of recordings of

lectures. BASE is a substantive corpus that will allow me to identify general quantitative patterns (e.g. across disciplines) as well as commonalities and differences between particular lecturers. The collection of my own data will enable local qualitative analyses that take into account non-verbal and contextual information; interviews with lecturers and a sample of students will also be carried out to supplement the qualitative analyses, and constrain possible over interpretation of data.

This dissertation, hopefully, draws attention to humour in English university lectures and consequently invites broader and longer term relevant research into the pedagogical implications of humour in EAP. However, as I have mentioned more than once in this dissertation, research into humour is complex, diversified, and difficult to unify, thus it requires a tailor-made system for each specific sub-category within it. There are still a large number of questions to be investigated and solved. Nonetheless, the potential enjoyment derivable from the study of humour should bring much motivation for us to continue this study, and it will be all the more enjoyable if one day we can share, appreciate and compare humour cross-culturally.

¹ Attardo (2001: 61-62) distinguishes spoken jokes between narrative/canned and conversational jokes. The former refers to those rehearsed and told by narrators while the latter improvised by speakers in conversation. However, he immediately admits the impossibility of this distinction since jokes are always recycled and adapted to different context. Some other scholars make similar distinctions such as Boxer & Cortés-Conde (1997) and Norrick (2003). In my dissertation I follow Attardo's version.

² The figures are from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Statistical First Release 117 released on Jan 10th 2008.

³ In the following part of this dissertation, I will use the name as GTVH to mention the final co-work of Attardo and Raskin.

⁴ This is agreed by most other researchers although different terms may be used.

⁵ How to Cite the BASE: <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/d/503/a/2681>, 01 Oct 2008

⁶ The Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) Guidelines define 500 different textual components and concepts which can be expressed using a markup language and defined by a DTD or XML schema.

⁷ Italics by the authors

⁸ However, it should be noticed that the number of lectures for non-UG is very small and may not reflect the general occurrence of laughter.

⁹ Due to the limitation of the BASE data listed in section 3.3, I followed a prudent approach to filtering out instances of humour. As a result some of the disqualified laughter might be considered humour instances if further evidence had been available.

¹⁰ For all the transcripts in this dissertation, "L" stands for lecturers; S stands for a single student; SS stands for more than one students present; SL stands for more than one students together with the lecturer.

¹¹ I defined joking as the speaker suggests something, which is usually very unlikely, happened or will happen to someone who can be the speaker per se, the hearer or someone absent. Joking is distinguished from joke-telling as in the latter the speaker tells a fictional alike story which is often announced by an opening like "listen, here is a joke for you"; it is distinguished from anecdote as in the latter the speaker is considered to be telling real events.

¹² The lecturer was referring to the camera set up in the classroom by the BASE crew.

¹³ *Grisbi* is a French film made in the 50s. A clip of it was originally censored in Britain.

¹⁴ All italics in the transcripts were added by me to highlight key words.

¹⁵ This is a pseudonym of the referred lecturer.

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Appendix. Transcription conventions

<inaudible>	Inaudible recording
(transcript)	Uncertain transcript
<laughter>	Iterated laughter
<name>	Anonymous name of a person or organisation
,	Pause (span: 0.2 ~ 1 second)
<Pause>	Pause (span > 1 second)
[Overlapped utterances
#	Hesitation or filler sounds
—	Truncated words